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REPORT

OF

THE MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT

TO

THE COMMITTEE OF VISITORS

OF THE



WARWICK

COUNTY LUNATIC ASYLUM.

1861.

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R E P O R T.

In laying before your Committee my present Annual Report, it is satisfactory to me to be able to state that the year just closed has been unmarked by any matters of unusual occurrence, or special anxiety, either in connexion with the health and condition of the patients, or with the general management and discipline of the Asylum.

The number of patients at the close of the year 1860 was 326, viz., 157 males and 169 females : at the close of 1861, it is 343, viz., 163 males and 180 females ; two of the latter being absent from the Asylum on trial. The increase is a trifle larger than that of the average for the preceding three years.

		M.	F.	Total.	Increase.
At the close of the year 1852, six months after the opening of the Asylum, there were		58	71	129	
At the close of	1853	85	100	185	56
" "	1854	112	107	219	34
" "	1855	124	113	237	18
" "	1856	132	129	261	24
" "	1857	140	146	286	25
" "	1858	151	149	300	14
" "	1859	155	161	316	16
" "	1860	157	169	326	10
" "	1861	163	180	343	17

The persistent increase here shown accords with the experience of all other County Asylums, and obviously can cease only when the discharges and mortality together equal in number the admissions. The accumulation of chronic cases in Asylums is not much affected by the mortality among them ; chronic insanity being in itself not specially injurious to life. Deaths, as recoveries, are much the most numerous in the first two years of residence, and are the result not so much of the mental disorder as of the irrecoverable changes in the brain or other vital organs that accompany some of its forms. The cause of increase must really be sought for in the character of the admissions ; and the most important, the most economical, and in every respect the most beneficial check to increasing numbers will be found in the greater

promptitude of parish authorities to have their insane poor placed under Asylum treatment in the earlier and curable stages of their disorder.

The great and continuous distress among the weaving population of Coventry and its immediate neighbourhood might have been expected to add somewhat to our numbers in the past year; but, from the enquiries I have been able to make, and especially from the statistics of insanity occurring among the poor receiving parochial assistance, by removal either to this Asylum or to their Union House, the distress, great as it has been, does not appear to have led as yet to any increase of mental disorder.

	M.	F.	Total.
* The number of insane poor of the City of Coventry receiving parochial relief in any form in the year 1861, has been	20	29	49
Ditto ditto in the 18 months ending December, 1861, the period of special distress	26	32	58
Ditto ditto in the preceding 18 months	28	26	54

An analysis of the admissions in the last two years, the period most affecting the relative numbers now in the Asylum, shows that for 1860, 53 per cent. might be considered incurable at the time of admission; 23 per cent. from the complication of epilepsy, idiocy, or general paralysis; 30 per cent. from the previous length of time that the mental disorder had existed. For 1861, 50 per cent. were admitted incurable; 24 per cent. from the former, and 26 per cent. from the latter causes. In Asylums for the care of mental disorder, in all its forms and complications, there must necessarily be found many out of every year's admissions that, from fair and legitimate reasons, have not been sent in a curable state; but the numbers indicated by this analysis are certainly much greater than is consistent with the proper welfare of the insane poor; and it is to be hoped that the recent Poor Law Amendment Act, which will shortly transfer the charge for their maintenance from their respective parishes to the common fund of their unions, will act as an incentive to the more speedy removal of recent and possibly curable cases.

The admissions in the past year have been 96, viz., 40 males and 56 females—17 of whom have no settlement in this county. The number sent from our own parishes does not differ materially from that of preceding years. There is an unusual disparity between the males and

* These numbers were obligingly sent to me by the Clerk to the Coventry Union.

females ; but that is probably accidental. Tabulating them under the different forms of insanity, there have been of

	M.	F.	Total.		M.	F.	Total.
Recent Mania (not above 12 months' duration)	16 ..	23 ..	39	Idiocy (uncomplicated)	1 ..	4 ..	5
Chronic Mania (above twelve months).....	12 ..	13 ..	25	Dementia, or Idiocy with Epilepsy ..	8 ..	7 ..	15
Dementia				General Paralysis ..	2 ..	1 ..	3
Melancholia	1 ..	8 ..	9		—	—	—
					40	56	96

The proportion of epileptics continues large, being one in every six admissions. The whole number of this class now in the Asylum is 61, viz., 34 males and 27 females.

The number of congenital idiots admitted in the past year has been 5 ; in the preceding one it was 4 ; and in no year has it been at all large. This is sufficiently explained by the fact that only such idiots as are found to be unmanageable in their homes, or Union houses, are sent here.

Much has been said and done of late years to develop a system of judicious management and treatment of this unfortunate class ; and the value of such measures is unquestionable ; though the anticipated results are, I fear, much overrated by the large proportion of those who philanthropically interest themselves in the subject. A popular impression is gaining ground that idiots can be taught to become tolerably useful members of society, and to contribute materially, if not wholly, to their own support, after a few years of training in a proper establishment. But the real results to be attained are rather the making of idiots more or less useful and happy members of the training establishment to which they have the good fortune to belong. The improvement there developed requires for its maintenance the constant stimulus of the same judicious supervision ; and when, on being returned to the world, such supervision can no longer be continued, its objects, with very few exceptions, speedily relapse into more degraded habits. The highest of them may, under favourable circumstances, manage to maintain a status among those who are considered of ordinary average mind ; but even these will be found so devoid of reflection, judgment, or self-reliance, as to hold the position they have gained only when their social circumstances are so favourable as to shield them from all, even the most trifling, troubles or trials of the world.

Idiots frequently possess special aptitudes—as a strong sense of harmony and melody ; a capacity for drawing, arithmetical calculations, or simple mechanics ; or strong powers of imitation ; and the development of such faculties has been the occasion of much hopeful wonder ; though it really amounts to little higher than the instinctive capacity for special instruction displayed by many of the lower animals. I do not by these remarks desire to disparage the cultivation of the endowments that idiots possess ; such a measure conduces, doubtless, very greatly to their personal comfort and happiness. All I would wish to impress is, that their education should be taken for simply what it is worth, and not be made the foundation for a superstructure of vain hopes of intellectual advancement out of the ranks of an Asylum into the busy ranks of every-day life.

There are in this Asylum 44 idiots, 24 males, and 20 females ; and, though with no more provision for their instruction than is adopted to stimulate and regulate the better faculties of the chronic insane and demented, with whom they are associated ; and, though many of them are not sent here until somewhat advanced in years ; there are very few of them who do not illustrate my preceding observations. The larger proportion of them have been brought to employ themselves in a greater or less degree, and all are improved in their habits ; but this improvement is maintained, not by their increased power of self-control or self-direction, but as a result of the continuous care bestowed on them to counteract their innate tendency to retrogression. I have endeavoured to ascertain the number of congenital idiots receiving parochial assistance throughout the county (excluding Birmingham) ; but am afraid I have made but a rough estimate of them. From some Unions no return is sent, as required by the Pauper Lunatics' Act, of their insane and idiotic paupers, not in an Asylum ; and in the returns from others there is no accurate distinction made between the idiotic and the chronic insane or demented ; so that it is difficult to arrive at reliable data. As far as I am able to make out, there are about 44 male and 62 female idiots taken care of by their friends or in the Union houses, who, added to those in this Asylum, make a total of 150. This number would probably fall far short of those for whom application as paupers would be made were there a special Asylum for this class.

The discharges and removals in the past year have been 47, viz., 16 males and 31 females ; 13 of them, viz., 4 males and 9 females, were merely removals to other Asylums belonging to counties in which were

the legal settlements of the patients; 3 females were discharged improved; and the remaining 31, viz., 12 males and 19 females, were recovered. Two other females, apparently recovered, are also away from the Asylum on trial; and one female, who is placed in the obituary, having died of consumption, was restored to a healthy state of mind some time before her death; but it was thought more advisable and humane that she should end her days here rather than undertake an exhausting journey to her home, more especially as she had no wish to be removed. The proportion of recoveries to admissions in no way militates against the curable character of ordinary recent insanity—as it must be borne in mind that recoveries cannot be expected, except in rare instances, from those who on admission are legitimately classed as incurables. From recent calculations of the Commissioners in Lunacy, deduced from the admissions into Lunatic Asylums, Hospitals, and Licensed Houses in England and Wales in the year 1857 (7,708), there were, by the end of the year 1859, discharged, recovered, 35.6 per cent.; and of those admitted within twelve months from the supposed commencement of the attack the recoveries were 44.3 per cent. This average is much below that of hospitals for the treatment of the presumed curable only—the disparity arising partly from the Commissioners having to include in their returns a large number whose insanity is of but short antecedent duration, but who are incurable from attendant complications, which would exclude them from such hospitals; partly, also, if I may judge from the experience of this county, from their tables containing as recent cases many decidedly chronic ones, erroneously returned by relieving officers in the official statements from which this portion of the Commissioners' statistics is chiefly compiled. Some relieving officers have been in the habit of stating as of three days' duration the mental disorder of all those whom they remove to an Asylum, because the law requires them to take steps for removal within three days of the parish medical officer having called their attention to the case as requiring it; others, with more reason, though equally erroneously, return chronic insanity of many years' standing, or even congenital idiocy, as of a few weeks or months' duration, because the particular paroxysm of excitement that led to their being taken to an Asylum was first observed at that antecedent period.

Taking all cases of insanity brought under treatment, not more than twelve months from commencement, I have no doubt that more than half are restored; and from uncomplicated insanity the recoveries are much greater.

The number of deaths has been 32, viz., 19 males and 13 females—giving a mortality of less than 9½ per cent. on the average number of patients for the year (341), which is below that of this Asylum in the preceding year (10.18), as well as of County Asylums generally. For the first ten months the deaths were very few, leaving, however, an accumulation of lingering cases to die out in the two succeeding ones.

Tabulating them under their respective heads, there have died from

M.	F.	Total.	M.	F.	Total.
Chronic disorganization of brain, and general Par-			Phthisis	1 ..	2 .. 3
alysis	10 ..	2 .. 12	Pneumonia	0 ..	1 .. 1
Apoplexy	1 ..	0 .. 1	Bronchitis	1 ..	0 .. 1
Epilepsy	2 ..	1 .. 3	General decay	3 ..	0 .. 3
Typhomania	0 ..	2 .. 2	Old age (72 to 90 years)	1 ..	4 .. 5
Marasmus	0 ..	1 .. 1		—	—
				19	13 32

We have been little affected by ordinary sickness; and the good sanitary condition of the Asylum has been evinced by immunity from such disorders as are found to be consequent on general deterioration of health or defective hygiene. Until the past year there had always been experienced some difficulty in disposing of our drainage, so as to avoid the evolution of noxious effluvia in too great a proximity to the building, or to the neighbouring public road; and, from a somewhat faulty structural arrangement, we had, in certain states of the atmosphere, been rather annoyed by offensive odours in the wards. During the past spring, however, Mr. Mc. Dougall, of Manchester, after one or two interviews with your Committee, adopted an application of his deodorizing and disinfecting fluid (carbolic acid), which has been eminently useful, and has the additional advantage of being inexpensive. By a force pump and service of small pipes the diluted liquid is conveyed to all cisterns for the supply of closets and urinals, with the object of insuring its effect within the building, in addition to the removal of offensiveness at the point of outlet, and in the subsequent exposed course of the drainage; and, after an experience of several months, I am glad to be able to state that the result has been in all respects highly satisfactory.

Throughout the year there have been no serious accidents, and I am again able to record that no suicide has occurred in the Asylum from the date of its opening. There has been no alteration in the general system of treatment and management; and, with few exceptions, the

conduct of the different attendants and servants has been satisfactory. The instances of misconduct that have occurred among them have been breaches of the general discipline of the Asylum, not of their special functions in connexion with the patients.

There have been no changes among the superior officers ; and all have now had several years' experience in their respective duties; which, combined with a zealous interest in the discharge of them, cannot fail to produce a beneficial influence throughout the Establishment.

W. H. PARSEY, M.D.

1st JANUARY, 1862.

